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# The Curriculum for Training Home Demonstration Workers

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THE CURRICULEM FOR TRAINING HOME  
DEMONSTRATION WORKERS\*

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In the preparation of this brief paper I requested suggestions not only from members of our home demonstration staff but from the heads of home-economics departments in several of the colleges, and State leaders of home demonstration work. What I shall say, therefore, is quite as much the consensus of opinion of those who are best qualified to know what is desirable in the way of training for home demonstration agents as my own views.

Rather strikingly, many of those who supplied suggestions to me stressed the importance of certain human characteristics as qualifications for successful home demonstration workers quite as much as, if not more than, that of college training. It seems to be generally agreed that the first essential to the making of a successful home demonstration worker is a good subject, and that those who do not have the proper background of character and personality may well be encouraged to enter other fields than home demonstration work. Among the characteristics which are most frequently mentioned are tact, energy, unselfishness, genuine interest in giving help to others, good health, an even temper, optimism, a love of rural life, and a background of rural experience. Those of you who recall the very excellent paper on requisites for success in extension work presented before this association by Director Ramsower several years ago will recognize these characteristics as among those stressed by him.

In general, the young woman who enters college has not yet determined what vocation she will follow. The need for sound basic training for future home demonstration workers is so essential that I question the desirability of specialization for work in this field before the senior year, if at all in the undergraduate course. The subjects suggested herein should all, or nearly all, be included in the undergraduate training of any home-economics worker, whether in teaching, research, or extension. Home demonstration workers should of course have sound training in what may be termed strictly home-economic subjects such as food preparation and preservation, human nutrition, home management, and clothing selection and design. In the South particularly, a knowledge of gardening and poultry keeping is desirable. Training in the basic sciences and in cultural subjects, however, is quite as important as training in strictly vocational subjects.

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I would particularly stress the need for good training in English looking toward clarity of expression in both the spoken and written word; training in public speaking, and participation in extra-curricular activities which will give the student poise, ability to express her views before a group, and broad human contacts. I have frequently been impressed with the inability of college graduates to write a good letter or to present their subject matter in plain, sound English. Publicity is an essential part of extension, so a course in news writing is helpful. The study of literature and courses in the appreciation of good music, the drama, and art are desirable. Rural people need help in these fields and are appreciative of it.

Courses in basic sciences such as chemistry and physics should be included, both because of the better background of understanding they supply for strictly vocational subjects and for mental training and the encouragement of an experimental attitude. These things of which I have spoken should of course be included in the training of any home-economics student, whether she expects to engage in extension work or some other home-economics activity.

For the prospective extension worker courses in educational methods are especially desirable. The extension worker is essentially a teacher, with a much broader field than have those who deal only with special age groups. Most home demonstration workers make contacts with girls and women ranging in age all the way from 10 to 70 years, and so have to meet all the problems involved in the education of both youth and adults. Some of our best home demonstration workers have been educated in normal schools where training in home-economics subject matter may have been less complete than that received in colleges of home economics, but they have the advantage of sound training in educational methods. In the selection of new home demonstration workers preference is given in many States to home-economics graduates who have had at least 2 or 3 years of teaching experience since graduation. The home demonstration worker should have an understanding of human values, should know why people behave as human beings, and so at least elementary courses in sociology, psychology, and philosophy should be included in the curriculum. More and more home demonstration workers are entering into problems of child development, family relationships, and community life, in the solving of which training in these subjects will be helpful. An elementary course in economics and, if possible, also a course in rural economics should be a part of the curriculum.

Most home demonstration workers work with 4-H club girls as well as adults, and, whether they realize it or not, they are frequently molding the futures of these young people. In order that their influence may be most helpful, training in vocational guidance is desirable. So also is training in recreational activities. As county extension workers, both men and women, are now expected to participate in a wide range of activities, their duties are increasingly administrative in character, creating a need for training in administration and office management.

I recognize that I have outlined perhaps more than it is possible to include in 4 years of college work. I recognize also that some of these subjects have not generally been included in the training of home demonstration workers in the past, notwithstanding which we have a very large number of

successful workers in this field. Suggestions for inclusion of social sciences in training courses, however, come frequently from the workers themselves whose experience impresses them with their need for better knowledge of these subjects.

I have not said anything about special training in extension methods. While I believe that a knowledge of extension work can best be gained from actual experience, if a semester course can be provided covering the history and development of extension work, the background and growth of the movement, and at least a broad general statement of how extension work is done, such a course would have real value, especially if given by one who has actively participated in extension work in recent years. The best training in extension methods, however, I believe can be obtained on the job from actual field experience. At least one State has tried the experiment of employing promising students, at a nominal salary, as assistants to some of the more capable home demonstration agents during the vacation period between their junior and senior years. If this is not practicable, perhaps prospective home demonstration workers in the senior year can participate in home demonstration and 4-H club activities in the county in which the college is located.

While my subject, I assume, was the undergraduate curriculum, my feeling is that much of the special training for home demonstration work, or for that matter any extension work, can best be obtained after the undergraduate course is completed. In general, I feel it is desirable, especially if a candidate for a home demonstration agent position has not had some years of teaching experience, to employ her for several months as assistant to a capable and experienced agent before assigning her to a county.

My interest, however, lies quite as much in special courses for extension workers on the job as it does in undergraduate training. I would like to see graduate courses for extension workers provided in at least ten or a dozen of our land-grant colleges, so distributed that they would be available to any extension worker within a reasonable distance. I am not thinking so much of courses leading to a postgraduate degree as I am to courses of perhaps 3 or 4 weeks' duration which would give the extension worker an opportunity to study some of the things for which his or her experience has developed a need. These short courses might include the study of extension methods under the direction of a capable leader or group of leaders, with wide opportunities for the selection of electives in economics, the social sciences, or other subjects in which the worker has found a lack in her earlier training. Several of our land-grant colleges have offered such courses, but the number is still far too few.

In my opinion, the specialist and supervisory staff should be recruited generally from the ranks of the county workers. One who has had county agent experience can best appreciate the problems to be met daily by the county worker and can best adapt her supervisory activities or subject matter to fit the needs of the agents in the counties. The intimate human contacts made by county home demonstration agents provide an excellent background of experience for specialist or supervisory duties. The most effective specialists, it seems to me, will be developed by encouraging capable county home demonstration agents who have shown a particular aptitude in some subject-matter line to take post-

graduate work to fit them for specialist positions.

In summarizing my remarks, I cannot do better than to quote from a discussion on the training of home demonstration workers recently by Mrs. Lucile Rust, in charge of teacher training in home economics at Kansas State College, for which I am indebted to Miss Amy Kelly. Mrs. Rust said -

"The extension program in home economics is one of the most important and challenging in education. The numbers reached are great and their ages range from youth to old age. Those who come for instruction do so, not because of coercion or force, but because of fundamental needs and interests. They are eager for information and expect to use what they learn.

"The home-economics extensionist, primarily a teacher, has a most difficult but extremely satisfying teaching job. Her school may be an entire county, a district, or a State. Her classroom is wherever a meeting place can be arranged. Unless a specialist and often then, she must be prepared to give instruction in any and all phases of homemaking. She must not only teach but instruct untrained women how to do it. She must not only be a leader but develop leadership in others. She must be a personal adviser, encouraging and helping many through trying periods of emotional and mental stress. She must have a deep understanding of rural life and its problems and likewise rural people.

"Obviously, for such responsibilities the highest type of training is necessary if this profession goes forward and makes the contribution it should to education. The job of the home-economics extensionist should be thoroughly studied and analyzed. In the light of the findings, a specific program of training should be planned and required. This without doubt will include as part of its essentials a thorough background of home-economics subject matter, economics, sociology, psychology, methods of extension teaching, philosophy of extension education, curriculum construction, and apprentice extension teaching.

"Training for the home-economics extensionist should not end with a 4-year college course, but graduate instruction for this profession leading to advanced degrees should be provided and urged. The program is so large and the opportunities for its development so great that the best possible trained women are needed. The standards should be such that only the superior can enter."



